



Black American Futures PAC

Candidate Endorsement Questionnaire

*The following questions present an opportunity to learn more about your views on key community issues and your vision for your 2022 School Board Primary Race. **Please complete and return no later than 11:59PM on April 14, 2022.** All candidate questionnaires will be published on our website. Late questionnaires are unable to be accepted for endorsement evaluation.*

Submission by Michelle Morancie, PhD

1. What are the top 3 issues facing your district?

In my opinion, the top 3 issues facing the Fulton County Schools are

- a) Inequality of academic performance between the north and south Fulton schools.
- b) Staff burnout
- c) Mental health issues among students and staff as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic

2. What are the top 3 policy priorities you plan to advocate for in the first 90 days of your term?

- a) The current Board has approved a 5% salary increase for teachers and support staff. However, we need to work on plans to raise teacher morale, especially in low performing schools with a high incidence of behavior problems. Teachers must be included when creating this plan.
- b) Create a plan to recruit School Psychologists in order to lower the staff/student ratio, with the goal of providing each school in the district with at minimum a .75 psychologist who is able to conduct special education assessments, as well as provide mandated and preventive mental health services to students in need.
- c) When indicated on an assessment, provide special needs students with Counseling services by a Social Worker, Psychologist, or School Counselor on their Individual Education Plan, per Section 300.34 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

3. The cradle-to-prison pipeline disproportionately impacts the Black community. Students who have difficulty in our schools are at a greater risk for arrest and incarceration. In your career, what have you done to protect students from violence, crime, or incarceration?

During my 30 years as a School Psychologist, mostly in grades K-5, I have worked closely with parents of color to help boost their children's academic achievement. Research shows that when children cannot read or do math by grade 4, there is greater likelihood of them dropping out of high school. Dropping out leads to involvement in violence and crime, which leads to incarceration and even death. My job was to assess



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children who were suspected of having learning difficulties, most often in reading. This was sometimes a difficult sell to parents because of concerns that their child would be “labeled”. However, when I pointed out that low grades and, sometimes, the associated behavior difficulties might be the result of learning delays, many parents were more likely to agree to completing an assessment of their child’s academic skills. Parents also learned that it was not common for children with learning problems to go directly into a full time “special education” class because federal law requires that we address learning delays in the least restrictive environment. When children’s reading delays were addressed in the early grades, they were likely to be more successful as they moved through the upper grades of elementary school. I also counseled parents about best practices when working with their children at home.

4. What will make your tenure on the board different from your predecessor’s (if you are an incumbent, your previous term)? Specifically, what aspects of the previous three years would you like to see change/have done differently? What are your priorities going forward?

During my tenure on the school board, I hope to encourage school leadership to give educators a strong voice and support. I have never met a teacher who was not dedicated to their students’ achievement. However, when the leadership does not provide the tools and resources teachers need to be successful or unnecessarily micromanages their work, the result is low morale and high staff turnover rate. One of my goals is to work with the superintendent to carefully choose talented school leaders who

- Are committed to encouraging and acknowledging their staff
- clearly communicate their vision
- create a school culture that involves collaboration and team decision-making.

5. What role, if any, does socio-economic status (housing, education, poverty, and transportation, for example) contribute toward student academic achievement?

Research shows that students from low economic status are more likely to attend schools where there is a high teacher turnover rate, low student resources, and eventually, high dropout rates, thus feeding that cradle to prison pipeline.

A review of the 2019 Georgia Milestones proficiency scores for Fulton County elementary schools shows that the scores in low SES areas in south Fulton County schools appear to be significantly lower than the scores in the more affluent north Fulton County schools. Proficiency scores in the northern schools show between 70-90+% proficiency on the English Language Arts (ELA) portion of the test. In contrast, schools on the south side average 50% proficiency and below. This discrepancy suggests that children in low income areas require more intensive academic intervention strategies, beginning with kindergarten, in order to level the playing field.



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6. Please share a unique experience in your history that represents your governing philosophy and how you make decisions.

Throughout my career as a School Psychologist, I was the lead member of school-based support teams. As the lead, I was responsible for completing assessments, consulting with my team members about their assessments, consulting with teachers and parents, and ultimately working together with all members of the team to recommend appropriate educational programs for children with special needs. I was also the advocate for parents and their children, along with the School Social Worker. I would say, then, that I make decisions by consulting and taking all information under consideration before making a final recommendation or directive.

7. Black students in Fulton County, compared to students of other races across the state, have lower academic performance. Which efforts from the past few years have had a positive impact on Black student achievement? What do you plan to do going forward to increase Black student achievement?

At the beginning of the 2019-2020, Fulton County offered the Jumpstart for Success program. Fifty South Fulton students entering grades 3 and 5 received nine days of academic instruction prior to the start of the school year with the goal of setting them up for success during the school year.

My plan: Reading is the key to success in school. Research shows that high achieving students enter kindergarten with a vocabulary of three million words. If Black students are to achieve in school, they must increase their vocabulary through reading. From kindergarten through 2nd grade, children are learning how to read. From 3rd grade, children are reading to learn, which requires development of their critical thinking skills. When building students' vocabulary, it is important to discover what they enjoy reading so that they will read for pleasure. The goal will be for them to read 1-hour/day for pleasure. This leads to positive academic outcomes.

8. Economic access and opportunity have continued to be issues politicians have campaigned on but have failed to completely deliver for the Black community. What can the school board do to increase postsecondary readiness to ensure greater access to jobs, training, and other opportunities to ensure greater economic progress in the Black community?

The school board can work with the superintendent to provide educational and social resources that will assure that black students are reading on or close to grade level by the time they reach 8th grade. This requires early development of reading skills, monitoring of attendance, limits on out-of-school suspensions, and parent engagement.



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Research shows that black students are 3.5 times more likely to receive out of school suspensions and school expulsions than white students. This results in lost academic time and difficulty keeping up with school work. More effective behavior intervention resources need to be put in place to keep students in school and learning to the best of their ability. Clinical staff (School Social Workers, School Psychologists, and School Counselors) need be increased within the school setting to provide support to the students and families. Community partnerships which provide internships that broaden the scope of career choices is another positive strategy for Black students.

9. Parents, teachers, and students are often pitted against each other in conversations around student achievement. This is NOT beneficial for Black students. Which of the aforementioned groups has the greatest impact on Black student achievement? Why? What can be done to bring these groups together to support a stronger educational future?

In my opinion, teachers and parents must work collaboratively to improve achievement for black students. Unfortunately, in low income neighborhoods, parent engagement can be quite challenging. In some cases, parents are working multiple jobs and cannot take time off to attend parent/teacher meetings. In some cases, language differences negatively impact collaboration. And in some cases, parents themselves have learning delays and do not have the ability to help their children at home. One way to address these issues is to provide support to the teachers. In the lower grades, it is helpful to have teachers move through two grades with the same class. This gives the children a sense of consistency that they may be missing in their home lives, while giving the teachers the opportunity to form long term teaching relationships with their students. Studies show that when teachers have this type of relationship with their students, achievement improves.

10. Broadband internet, especially since the onset of COVID-19 pandemic, has become increasingly key to access education, the economy, and community. Many residents lack reliable access in a city where technology is available and the industry is thriving. What are your plans to increase affordable access to broadband internet for Black communities?

In 2022, all students should have access to the internet, both at home and at school. Without it, students are at a distinct disadvantage. The district provides devices for grades 3-12. However, if the students have no access to the internet at home, their ability to benefit from the devices is limited. The school board can work with internet companies to provide low-cost services to homes with school-aged children. The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), for example, is a U.S. government program that helps many low-income households pay for broadband service and internet-connected devices. Several internet



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companies offer low-cost internet services for families in need. The district could partner with these companies to provide services in low-income areas.

11. What areas for partnership do you see with other organizations, governmental bodies, or community stakeholders that could benefit Black students?

Most important is that there is inequity between State and Local school funding. The State of Georgia places 75% of the educational funding burden on local communities, while only taking on 25% of the burden. Partnership with the State Department of Education would be beneficial to black students in lower income areas. In addition, State and local districts should work together to obtain and efficiently distribute Title 1 funds to the neediest schools.

As mentioned previously, the district should partner with local internet companies to provide access for low-income families.

Belief Statements

To what extent do you agree, or disagree, with the following statements? Please include a detailed explanation of your response.

1. There is a history of Black people being disproportionately denied access to educational and economic opportunity in Fulton county.

AGREE: Schools in predominately Black areas tend to be low performing schools. Low educational achievement results in limited economic opportunity.

2. Ensuring equitable access to a strong education and postsecondary opportunity is a primary responsibility of a Fulton County school board member.

AGREE: It is the responsibility of the school board to insure that ALL students receive an education that prepares them to positively contribute to the greater society



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3. Socio-economic factors play a significant role in education.

AGREE: Sadly, low socio-economic factors impede education in our society. Schools in low SES areas tend to have few resources, and therefore, the students do not perform on par with students from higher SES areas.

4. The future of a county and its communities depends on a high-quality education system.

AGREE: It is up to the educational leadership to provide our students with a high-quality education so that they can use their skills to improve the quality of life in this nation.

Thanks for completing our questionnaire. If there is anything else you'd like to share with voters about yourself or your campaign, please use the space below to do so: